

McJURE, Col. A.K.

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CONTEMPORANIES

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Abraham Lincoln's Contemporaries

Col. A.K. McClure

Excerpts from newspapers and other
sources

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LINCOLN AS I KNEW HIM.

BY COL. A. K. McCLURE.

Col. Alexander K. McClure, the distinguished journalist of Philadelphia, is the only man now living who held intimate relations with Abraham Lincoln. Col. McClure was one of President Lincoln's confidential advisers during the entire stressful period of the war, and the appended article from his pen is therefore of great historical value.

I FIRST met Lincoln early in January, 1861, when a serious complication about a cabinet appointment in Pennsylvania, in which I had taken some part, resulted in a personal request from Lincoln to visit him at Springfield. The Pennsylvania legislature, of which I was a member, had just convened and an animated senatorial contest was on hand, but I felt that it was necessary that I should comply with the invitation and make as speedy a journey as possible.

At some point in Indiana I discovered that I would be likely to reach Springfield at 7 o'clock in the evening, and I telegraphed Lincoln that I would be there at that hour and must return at 11. I arrived at Springfield on time and immediately proceeded to Lincoln's residence, rang the door bell and in a very short time it was opened by Lincoln himself. I confess that I was greatly surprised at the appearance of the man. Although six foot two myself, I had to look up into the face of a man six foot four, who was ill clad, awkward and ungraceful in person, and homely in feature.

We went immediately into the plain parlor of his house, and I at once proceeded to discuss the question that was at issue between us. He had notified Gen. Cameron of Pennsylvania of his purpose to appoint Cameron to a position in the cabinet, to which I was opposed. I presented all I had to say on the subject and answered the few questions which he presented to me. I studied him carefully, but saw that he was a man who knew how to conceal completely his purposes, and we closed the discussion on the subject of a cabinet appointment without my knowing or having any intimation whatever as to the effect of the protest I had made.

Lincoln as He Was.

After Lincoln had heard me on the principal subject of my visit we naturally came to a discussion of the political conditions and then, for the first time, I saw Lincoln in all the grandeur of his character. Three of the southern states had already seceded, so that secession at that time was already in progress and certain to involve all of the cotton states. Mr. Lincoln then became the chief talker and I listened to him for nearly two hours in his expressions as to the peculiar obligations which were imposed upon him and the gravity of the issues which confronted him. I speedily forgot that he was homely in person and ungraceful in action as he warmed up to the singularly delicate and gravely responsible duties which confronted him. He exhibited the highest attributes, not only of statesmanship, but of integrity and fidelity to the sacred trust that had been committed to him, and I left him profoundly impressed that the govern-

ment, even in the extremest peril that ever confronted it, was in the safest possible hands, and that judgment was vindicated until the day of his death.

I was one of those who participated in arranging the famous Lincoln midnight journey from Harrisburg to Washington on the night of the 22d of February, 1861.

When Mr. Lincoln arrived at Philadelphia on the evening of the 21st he was met by Mr. Felton, president of the Philadelphia, Wilmington & Baltimore railroad, and by Allan Pinkerton, the founder of the Pinkerton Detective agency, and notified that he could not go through Baltimore on the 23rd, as was his program from Harrisburg, and hope to pass through that city alive. They earnestly urged him to allow himself to be taken to the Baltimore depot and board a train that left at 11 o'clock that night for Washington without others knowing anything about it. He declined and on the 22nd, after he himself had raised the flag over Independence hall and delivered a brief address, went to Harrisburg on a special train and was received by the legislature in the house of representatives. Gov. Curtin invited him to a dinner at 5 o'clock at one of the principal hotels of the capital and there were 17 or 18 who attended the dinner, of whom I am the sole survivor. Gov. Curtin was advised of what had transpired in Philadelphia the night before and had consultation with several of his friends on the subject, and it was decided that Lincoln's program must be changed in some way.

The dinner was served at 5 o'clock, and by direction of the governor, was hurried as speedily as possible and at the end of an hour the governor dismissed the servants from the room, closed the doors and announced to the guests at the dinner the information he had received and had been communicated to Mr. Lincoln at Philadelphia the night before and suggested that it was now a necessity to change the program of the president. Col. Scott, vice-president of the Pennsylvania railroad, was one of the guests at the dinner, and the governor inquired of him whether he could not deliver Mr. Lincoln to Washington that night, to which Col. Scott responded that he could do so without difficulty.

"What Would the People Think?"

After Curtin had stated these facts everyone at the table cordially responded to the proposition to send the president through to Washington that night. Lincoln alone was silent. I sat close to him and noticed, with interest, his sad, but inexpressive face. The governor finally said to him: "You seem to be the only one that is silent. What is your view of this proposition?" To which Mr. Lincoln answered with a pathos that greatly impressed everyone present: "I can't assent to it. What would the people think of their president stealing into his capitol like a thief in the night?"

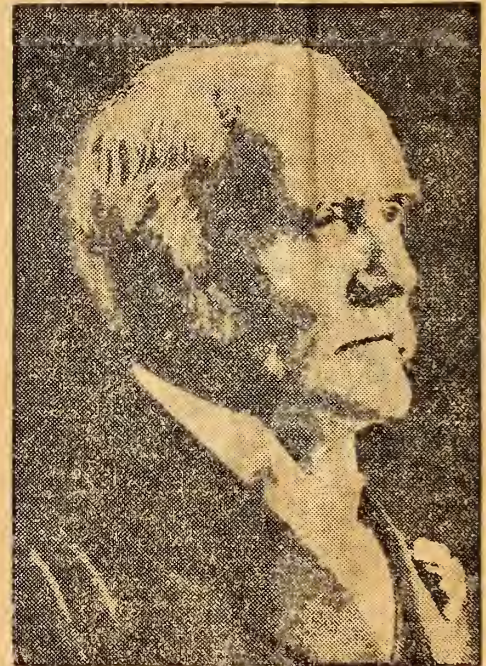
Gov. Curtin promptly responded that it was not a question for Mr. Lincoln to consider. It was the duty of those present to decide the

case for him, and it was unanimously decided that he must leave, as Col. Scott had given the assurance that he could deliver him in Washington that night, and Lincoln simply submitted in silence. It was at once decided that one man should accompany the president and that he should make the selection. He selected Mr. Lamon, who was one of those who had accompanied him from Illinois, and who he afterward made marshal of the District of Columbia.

The governor said to Col. Scott: "The matter is now in your hands. Give any directions that you choose."

How the Plan Was Laid.

Col. Scott at once said: "Governor, you take the president downstairs"—where there were



A. K. McCLURE.

thousands of people in the street wanting to meet and cheer Lincoln—"and after they have cheered him, call your carriage and announce in as distinct tones as possible to the driver to drive to the executive mansion."

That was the natural thing for the governor to do, as it was important that no suspicion should be created as to the change in Lincoln's program. He also directed them to drive by the executive mansion and then turn down and be at the Pennsylvania depot in 30 minutes.

Lincoln, Curtin and Lamon left at once and Col. Scott and myself walked hurriedly down to the depot. Scott first communicated with Pinkerton and the superintendent of the Philadelphia, Wilmington & Baltimore railroad in Philadelphia, and then cleared one track of his road between Philadelphia and Harrisburg,

with orders that it should not be used until released. As soon as he had accomplished that he cut every telegraph wire that entered the city of Harrisburg, all of which at that time went through the Pennsylvania railroad, and ordered a locomotive and single car to be taken a square below the depot. Soon thereafter Curtin, Lamon and Lincoln drove up in a carriage and Lincoln and Lamon were put in this single car and we bade them good-bye as the special train moved off on its momentous journey.

"The Longest Night of My Life."

It had an entirely clear track to Philadelphia and arrived at West Philadelphia with much more than sufficient time to make the journey from there to the station of the Philadelphia, Wilmington & Baltimore railroad. Pinkerton met them there, placed Lincoln and Lamon in a carriage and took a seat with the driver, notifying him that the men in the carriage were detectives who were seeking to develop some criminal affairs and he wished him to drive them to several portions of the city. He did not want them to arrive at the Baltimore station until about the time the train would start. Pinkerton had tickets for Lamon and Lincoln and also a section in the sleeping car secured in advance. He managed the carriage so as to get it down to the Baltimore station about five minutes before the train left and Lincoln and Lamon with their tickets immediately walked to their sections in the sleeping car without anyone suspecting who they were.

It was 7 o'clock when the special train with the president and Lamon left Harrisburg and the wires were then cut so that no communication could be had with the outside world. The train that Lincoln was expected to get on in Philadelphia was due in Washington at 6 in the morning and the wires could not be restored at that time. I recall it as the longest night within my recollection. It seemed as if 6 o'clock in the morning would never arrive, but finally a short time before that hour Col. Scott reconnected the wires and soon thereafter he received this dispatch: "Plums delivered nuts safely," as had been agreed upon before Lamon left, and Scott's hat went up to the ceiling as he burst out in grateful acknowledgment of Lincoln's safety shouted that "President Lincoln is in Washington."

When Lincoln was inaugurated as president of the United States there was not a single member of his cabinet, nor any one of the republican leaders of congress, who believed that he was qualified for his position. There was Seward, Chase, Sumner, Wilson and many others in congress who believed him to be an unsophisticated countryman, without the knowledge of statesmanship, and entirely unfitted to cope with the exceptionally embarrassing issues which confronted him. Most of these men had a distinct and declared policy as to the duty of the administration in meeting the secession of the southern states. Lincoln had none. He was the only man of all of them who understood that the policy to be pursued for the safety of the republic depended entirely upon future developments.

Lincoln Did Not Want War.

Most of the leading republican senators and other leaders had a distinctive policy of their own for a restoration of the union, and Lincoln, knowing that the government must de-

side its policy upon future developments, was without a declared policy. In his inaugural he stated that war would not be made upon the south. He had found the cotton states practically united in secession. Most of the leading forts and arsenals were captured and he was utterly powerless to attempt an aggressive war. The north was not only divided upon the question of war, but a large majority of the northern people were averse to it and if Lincoln had attempted to precipitate war by attempting the recapture of forts or arsenals, the north would have been powerless to support him and the south solid against him. The little regular army of that day was practically divided by nearly one-half of its strength going to the south, and he was entirely without an army to undertake any aggressive movement against the south. Thus, Lincoln stood silent and patient against the various aggressive propositions of men who had been accepted as leaders of the republican party, and the problem was finally solved for him by the mid-summer madness that made the confederate secretary of war order the bombardment of Fort Sumpter at a time when the assurance of the surrender of Maj. Anderson's command was given to be carried out within two days unless reinforced by his government, which was impossible.

That act of the confederate government united the north and sounded the death knell of the confederacy. From that time until the close of the war the duty of Lincoln was plain and he fulfilled every demand made upon him. The first important battle of the war was Bull Run, where the Union army was defeated and routed, and it was then that Lincoln rose up to the full majesty of his duty and opportunity. On the night that the Union army was driven back from Bull Run into the intrenchments of Washington he wrote out, with great care, the war policy of the government, which he delivered to the war department on the following morning, and in that policy he exhibited the highest qualities of a strategist. He declared that the Army of the Potomac must be reinforced and made aggressive, and he stated distinctly that Kentucky, Tennessee and the southwest must be mastered by military authority.

Lincoln the Great Strategist.

The policy of Lincoln, as expressed in that paper, was carried out to the letter and the government saved thereby, and during the three years of the war before the appointment of Grant as lieutenant-general he was not only the military leader of our entire army, but he directed and ordered the various armies we had in the field in the various movements. When Grant was appointed he felt that he could intrust the military direction entirely to the commander-in-chief and in no instance did he reverse or interfere with Gen. Grant, but until Grant became the commander he was the strategist and military commander of the war.

The south strangely misunderstood Lincoln, and yet, considering the fierce sectional passions which came with the civil war, it is not surprising.

I saw him many times after the midnight hour when with his heart upon his sleeve, he spoke with freedom of the sorrows of the country, which he profoundly felt, and of the perils to the government, but in no single instance did I ever hear him utter a single sentence of resentment against anyone. I heard

him many times speak of President Davis and of the leading men of the confederacy and never in a single instance with disrespect. He understood that they believed in their cause and that they were offering their lives for their convictions, but he believed also, that no greater calamity could occur to either north and south than the success of the confederacy by the dismemberment of the union.

Fifteen years after the war had closed I happened to be journeying in the south for a season of rest, and when at Mobile was invited by President Davis to visit him at his home at Beauvoir. I was more than willing to comply and spent a most delightful day with him.

In the course of the conversation he said he desired to know more about the character of Lincoln, as he understood that I had known him well and seen him in all the various phases of the civil conflict. He inquired very minutely as to his personal qualities, his habits, his manners, his feelings, and his actions, and I was able to give him very minute information on all the subjects. When he had concluded his inquiries as to the character of Lincoln, with a pathos that I shall never forget, he made this statement: "Next to the day of the fall of the confederacy the south has known no darker day than the assassination of Lincoln." He had learned how the south had misunderstood Lincoln and he remembered that that misunderstanding of his character had been an important factor not only in provoking, but in prolonging the war.

Lincoln was ever earnestly in favor of effecting peace between the north and the south upon a basis that would bring the south back with some sympathy for the Union. In August of 1864, when he was a candidate for re-election, he exhibited to me in the White house in his own handwriting the proposition to pay the south \$400,000,000 for the slaves if they would accept reunion. I said to him that if such sentiments became known to the public before the next election he would be defeated by an overwhelming majority. He said he knew that, but that it was, in his judgment, entirely right and the best possible solution of the war.

I remember distinctly his declaration that the war was then costing nearly \$4,000,000 a day, independent of the loss of life and the destruction of property, and that the war could not be closed by military movements within 100 days. He believed that that method of peace would not only be very greatly economical to the government, but what he most desired was that the south resume relations with the Union with some sympathy and interest in their government.

What he most feared and deprecated was that the confederate armies would be overwhelmingly scattered and nearly all of them would have to return to desolated fields and breadless homes and he feared anarchy in the south. While the compensation for the slaves would give them not only the assurance of some sympathy of an interest in them, it would also give them the means to revive their industries, and as he said, aid us in paying our great national debt. That his theory was right will hardly be disputed by any at this time, but with the surging sectional passions of that day there were few who viewed the situation with the patriotic calmness of Abraham Lincoln.

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Col. M'Clure Recalls Incidents of Lincoln's Midnight Journey

By Col. Alexander K. McClure.

The story of the midnight journey of Abraham Lincoln from Harrisburg to Washington on the night of February 22, 1861, has been told many times and I do not propose to repeat it, but there are some rather entertaining incidents which occurred in arranging for Lincoln's sudden departure, of which the public has never been informed. I was then a member of the State Senate and Chairman of the Lincoln and Curtin committee that had fought and won the battle for them in the fall of 1860, and I had met Lincoln only once when early in January he telegraphed me to visit him at Springfield.

After Lincoln had been given a reception and delivered a speech in the hall of the House of Representatives in the early part of the afternoon, Governor Curtin invited some eighteen or twenty of his friends to dine with him at a dinner he gave to Lincoln at what was then the Jones House and now the Commonwealth, at 5 o'clock in the evening. Of all who attended

that dinner I cannot recall one who is living but myself.

Lincoln's program as published when he started from Springfield on his journey to Washington arranged for him to leave Harrisburg on the morning of February 23rd and proceed through York and Baltimore to Washington, but information had reached Lincoln and his friends, through the Pinkerton Agency, heartily supported by President Felton of the Philadelphia, Wilmington and Baltimore railroad, that he would certainly be assassinated in Baltimore if he passed through according to his program. Lincoln was most reluctant to have his route changed, but he was overruled and Curtin and Colonel Scott, who was a guest at the dinner, understood that the program must be changed in some way and announcement of it made at the close of the dinner.

Dismissed the Servants.

Curtin arranged to have the dinner served as speedily as possible and by 6 o'clock he dismissed all the servants from the dining room and locked the door. When Curtin stated the conditions and the necessity of a change in Lincoln's route he asked Colonel Scott whether he could deliver Lincoln in Washington that night. To which he answered: "Certainly I can," and Curtin at once said: "The mat-

ter is in your hands." Scott was a man of the keenest perception and promptest action and he immediately ordered Curtin to take the President down in front of the hotel, where thousands were waiting to greet him, and after they had an opportunity to cheer him, call his carriage and announce in as distinct tones as possible: "Drive to the Executive Mansion," and then make a detour and be at the depot in thirty minutes. It was the logical thing for Lincoln to go to the Executive Mansion as the guest of the Governor and it was done to disarm suspicion.

Precautions Taken By Scott.

I went with Scott to the railroad office and he cleared the line to Philadelphia, not to be used until released, ordered out a fine locomotive with a single car, notified Pinkerton to be at the West Philadelphia station at 10 o'clock to carry out their arrangements and then he cut all the telegraph wires coming into Harris-

burg, which at that time all passed through the Pennsylvania railroad. Curtin and Lincoln drove by the Executive Mansion and according to arrangements were at the depot on time and Curtin, Scott and myself bade Lincoln and Lamon, who accompanied him, good-bye as they hurried into the car that moved at once on its momentous journey.

Harrisburg was crowded with thousands of strangers who came to meet Lincoln and it was not doubted that among them would be the spies of those who contemplated his assassination in Baltimore, and it was of the utmost importance that Lincoln be started on his journey without observation to any except those immediately concerned, as his change of route might have been telegraphed in cipher before he left the city.

Lincoln Selects Companion.

When it was settled that Lincoln was to leave the dining room at once, Governor Curtin suggested that one person and only one person should accompany the President and asked him to name the man he chose as his companion on what all then felt to be a somewhat perilous journey. He promptly named Mr. Lamon, who was one of his party from the West and was a man of extraordinary physical power. Indeed he was chosen by Lincoln as one of the party at Springfield as his special protector. When they were moving toward the door, Curtin called Lamon aside and said: "Lamon are you well heeled?" Lamon smiled significantly as he said: "I think I am." He immediately exhibited to Curtin a pair of good size revolvers stowed in his hip pockets. He had a pair of brass knuckles in another pocket and pulled partly out its place on his back a magnificent Bowie knife. Curtin said: "I guess you will do." There is no doubt that Lincoln made the very best selection possible in choosing Lamon as his companion for the journey.

Another interesting incident of that night has never yet been given to the public. One thing that all felt to be of paramount importance was to avoid the possibility of even a suspicion on the part of any outsiders that Lincoln's route was to be changed that night, but it became known

McClure, A. K.

throughout the hotel that the servants had been ordered out of the dining room and the door locked and of course there was much discussion on it in the halls.

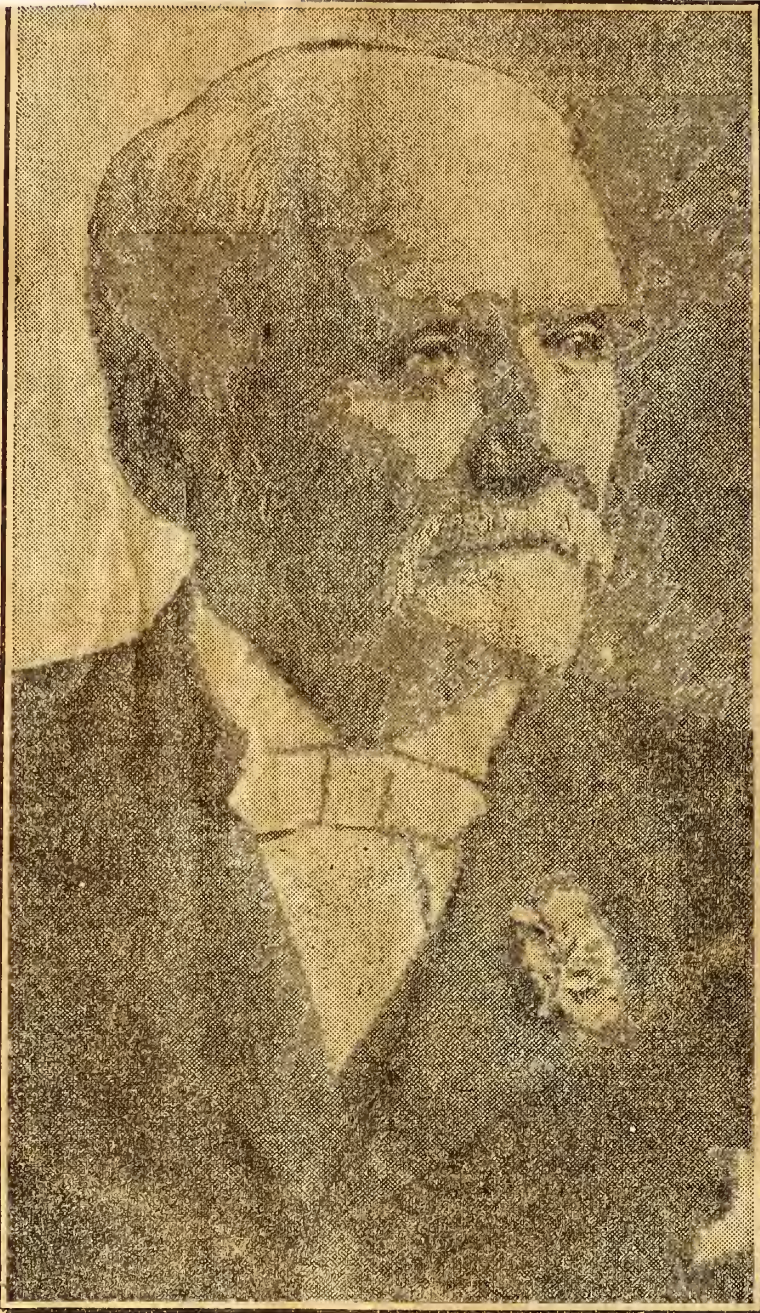
Mrs. Lincoln Became Excited.

Mrs. Lincoln when advised that the dining party were sitting under lock and key, became very much excited and making inquiries of all she met and distinctly declaring that if there was any change in Mr. Lincoln's program she must accompany him. Colonel Sumner, afterwards General Sumner of the Army of the Potomac, and Norman Judd, chairman of Lincoln's State Committee, and I were among the first to come out of the dining room when Mr. Lincoln was just about to start from the hotel, and we met Mrs. Lincoln talking loudly and excitedly in a manner that would lead anyone who hear her to understand that there was to be a change in Lincoln's programme. We did not stop to discuss it with her but Mr. Judd opened the door of his own room, which was near by and we, just as gently as possible but not without some physical force, led Mrs. Lincoln into Mr. Judd's room, where Colonel Sumner followed and I locked the door. If there were any persons who could keep her quiet in the room it was the men who were with her and we heard nothing more of her during the evening.

I was so disgusted at Mrs. Lincoln's conduct that evening that I never spoke to her afterwards. I have taken ladies to her reception in Washington without even addressing her. But I am satisfied that she was then unbalanced in mind, but not sufficiently to dethrone her as mistress of the White House. Lincoln was a most devoted husband and father, but even the sorrows of war, which agonized Lincoln's sympathetic heart to the uttermost, did not equal the sorrow given him by a wife who was surely drifting into mental darkness. She spent her later days in an asylum and died there.

Veteran of Unique Record Dead

Johnstown, Feb. 11.—Thomas Parfitt, aged sixty-three years, who was a member of the Union Veteran Legion, the Grand Army of the Republic, and the Sons of Veterans, a record held by few in the State, died at his home here today.



COL. ALEXANDER K. MCCLURE.

